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ABSTRACT

The present paper reports on a case study investigating the acquisition of form and function of the English progressive by a seven-year-old Hebrew speaker, learning English as a second language. The paper describes the different elicitation techniques used, and discusses the suitability of such techniques for the investigation of form and function. As a result of the study, a developmental sequence in the subject's acquisition of the progressive is established. The sequence exhibits clear stages in the acquisition of form but less distinct ones in the acquisition of function. The paper calls, therefore, for further study of the developmental sequence in the acquisition of the English progressive, with the overall goal of arriving at a valid index of development for the beginning ESL learner. (Author)

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THE ACQUISITION OF THE ENGLISH PROGRESSIVE: A CASE STUDY OF A SEVEN-YEAR-OLD HEBREW SPEAKER

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Introduction[1]

In the search for better insights into first and second language acquisition, many studies have concerned themselves with the sequence in which learners acquire certain linguistic forms. Perhaps the best documented area is the order in which English morphemes are acquired. Brown (1973), the pioneer in this field, conducted a longitudinal study of three children acquiring English as their native language, and reported on the existence of a developmental sequence of fourteen morphemes.[2] The progressive was the first morpheme acquired by the three children.

Following Brown's longitudinal study, de Villiers and de Villiers(1973) undertook a cross-sectional study of 21 English speaking children, examining the use of the same fourteen morphemes in obligatory contexts. Their results strongly supported Brown's findings. Burt and Dulay(1973) adopted Brown's procedure and examined a subset of his morphemes, with children learning English as a second language. They found that three different groups of Spanish speaking children acquired the eight studied English morphemes in approximately the same order, though an order that was somewhat different from the order found in the L1 studies mentioned above.

On the basis of the hypothesis that the creative construction process plays a major role in child L2 acquisition, Dulay and Burt (1974) set out to find a common sequence of acquisition across diverse L1 speakers learning English. They compared Chinese and Spanish speaking children and concluded "the sequences of acquisition of 11 functors (morphemes) obtained for Spanish and Chinese children are virtually the same" (49).

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Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1974) used Dulay and Burt's elicitation instrument in their study of seventy-three adult ESL learners and found significant correlations with the Dulay and Burt results, thus adding further support to the notion that there is a basic sequence of acquisition of English morphemes for all second language learners. To further validate this hypothesis, Diane Larsen-Freeman (1975) studied twenty-four adult students of four different language backgrounds, in four different tasks: reading, writing, listening, imitating and speaking. The results show clearly that L2 morpheme orderings are different from L1 orderings, but show significant statistical correlation among different language groups learning English. Although the learners' L1 can account for some of the variability exhibited by the different groups, there is definitely a tendency towards a similar order for all L2 learners of English.

It is significant, from the point of view of the present study, that all the L2 studies mentioned above found the progressive to be an 'early' acquired morpheme. They all agree that the 'simple progressive', namely the Verb-ing, is acquired before the 'full form' - BE+Verb-ing, but they make no mention of function. To these we may add Adams (1978) who noted that the progressive was the first marker of aspect to be learned by her ten Spanish children learning English, and Hakuta (1976) who found that his subject, a Japanese child learning English, also acquired the progressive before any other grammatical morpheme.

Judy Wagner-Gough (1975) strongly recommends looking at both form and function of the progressive. She reiterates the fact that the semantic role of the progressive in the learner's speech has remained improperly analyzed. She shows how her subject, Homer, a five-year-old speaker of Assiryian, used the Verb-ing form to refer to present, future and past. For a long time Homer's Verb-ing covered all tenses and aspects and even the imperative. When can one say that Homer actually acquired the English progressive? Homer's case, therefore, points very clearly to the need for function considerations in the description of language acquisition.

The present study attempts to investigate the following two questions concerning the subject's acquisition of the English progressive:

(1) What stages of development are evident in the acquisition of FORM?
(2) What relation is there between FUNCTION and FORM in the subject's use of the progressive in English?

The Subject

Orly, the youngest of three sisters, was born in Israel in 1970. She came to the United States for the first time at the age of 18 months. The family stayed in an English-speaking environment for about five months, and then returned to Israel. At the time of her arrival in the States, Orly was at the holophrastic sentence stage in Hebrew, her mother tongue, and by the end of the five months had become quite fluent in L1. Her L1 development was probably not affected by the period of stay in the States since the family continued to speak Hebrew at home. Orly was exposed to only limited English spoken by her cousins and neighbors. There seemed to be no obvious effect from this exposure except for two or three expressions such as: "Yes"; "Stop it!"; "O.K."

After returning to Israel at the age of two, Orly went to nursery school, followed by kindergarten and the first grade in school. The language environment both at home and outside the home was basically Hebrew. She was exposed to some English at home: English-speaking relatives, friends of the family, some English spoken by the older two sisters and the parents, and English Instructional TV programs (with no Hebrew translation). There was obviously some English input, but whether there was also any intake is difficult to say. There was certainly interest and no resentment towards English on Orly's part.

At the age of 6.8, Orly returned to the United States, (September 1977), this time for a longer period of stay. Her knowledge of English upon arrival would be hard to define accurately but she exhibited some recognition knowledge. She began attending school (a regular English speaking second grade) on September 15,1977.

Orly's initial speech in English seemed to be heavily affected by Hebrew in terms of both the pronunciation and sentence structure. During the first two weeks of school, when she obviously wanted very much to speak English like the other children, she would often go into long monologues of incomprehensible English-like sounds, very much like Homer, Judy Gough's (1975) subject. This however did not last beyond the first two weeks.

Data Collection

The data collected for the present study represents a period of two months, from October 1 through December 1,1977. Before the study began various utterances had been listed from observation and these constitute a pre-study description of the type of language used by Orly. This pre-study material represents the period of September 20 through October 1. Observation was thus begun very shortly after Orly's arrival in the States.

Since the researcher was Orly's mother, the data was collected mostly at informal sessions at home. They varied in length from 15-20 minutes to almost an hour. The initial sessions were closer to each other (two or three days apart) and they later stabilized to weekly sessions. Since the researcher was collecting comparable data from two other Hebrew speakers[3] at the same time, the procedure was kept as uniform as possible.

A number of different elicitation techniques were used in collecting the data for this study. The first sessions were devoted to recording spontaneous speech. This involved Orly interacting with her mother, her English speaking cousin, or her older sisters. It soon became obvious that this type of data collection would make it difficult to focus on any particular structure or verb form. It was therefore decided to create a number of different basic situations or contexts, which would test for control of tense and aspect, specifically the progressive aspect, and at the same provide a way to replicate data for different subjects or in different sessions with the same subject. The following techniques were used in the present study:

(a) Initiation of free speech was achieved by providing the subject with a 'lead in' phrase which provided both the content and the structural context. Thus for instance: "What do you do in school everyday?" would be a suitable question to lead into daily-routine activities. "What did you do at school today?" would be suitable to initiate free speech centering on past activities. Such contexts can be used a number of times and thus provide a way to compare data collected in different sessions.

(b) Talking about pictures proved to be a most useful technique to initiate natural speech and yet have some control over the context both structurally and lexically. Moreover, pictures proved especially useful for the elicitation of the present progressive, as well as simple past and past progressive when the picture stories were told from memory.

The pictures used for elicitation techniques were taken from a coloring book that Orly used, Donn Byrne's "Progressive Picture Compositions" (Longman 1967), and a few other pictures came from a variety of textbooks suitable for Orly's age. In order to develop the use of pictures into a useful elicitation tool, the pictures were organized into sets which were then reused periodically. This allowed for uniform data collection from different subjects and provided a good way of comparing their overall acquisition over time.

The "Progressive Picture Compositions" were very useful in creating a sequence of events which made up a complete story. Each picture in the set provided a suitable context for the present progressive. When subsequent pictures were covered up they provided context for 'future' events, and when the whole sequence was told from memory it was useful for describing past events. By reusing the sets of pictures several times during the period of observation, it was possible to evaluate the subject's performance at various stages of acquisition more effectively Thus for example on October 5, Orly produced the following stream of speech when looking at a picture of Donald Duck:

> "Donald Duck wearing pyjamas and on her...his shoulder he has a towel. And wearing a funny hat. Clarabelle typing letters to somebody."

On November 1, she produced the following utterances when n looking at the same picture:

> "Donald Duck is looking at the mirror. He is wearing a funny hat, and I think he's wearing pyjamas. This is Clarabelle the cow, and she is typing letters for somebody."

(c) Imitation of sentences seems to be a useful technique for focusing on form. However we must distinguish mechanical repetition from short-term memory, from meaningful repetition. If only one clause is presented for imitation as for instance "Karen is reading", there is no certainty that ability to produce it properly, indicates in any way a step towards acquisition of the form. On the other hand if the subject repeats a longer stretch (two or more clauses) such as "I am sitting and talking to you and Karen is doing her homework in the next room", she must concentrate on reproducing the meaningful message. In fact Orly never repeated such stretches of speech exactly the way they were presented; she usually added or changed things: "My sister is doing her homework and I'm sitting and talking about me". Data collected via this imitation/production technique tended to have a slightly higher percentage of correct responses than spontaneous speech.

Thus during the period beginning on October 1, it became obvious that Orly was not producing the auxiliary in 'is+Verb-ing' while imitating sentences at the beginning of this period, while by October 10, she was producing about 80% of correct responses with this form and this technique. When engaged in spontaneous speech, however, she had only 35% correct forms at this point. One might speculate that Orly is by nature a 'good imitator' since the other two subjects, that were studied with similar techniques exhibited an identical percentage of correct forms in both imitation/production and free production. [4]

(d) Retelling a story after reading it aloud was a technique developed almost by necessity. Since Orly was acquiring the reading skill in English while the study was taking place, she insisted on reading aloud and having her voice recorded. It turned out to be a valuable data collection technique, providing the content and context for a long stream of speech (retelling the whole story) which could be replicated several times.

(e) Self-correction was another technique developed accidentally, which proved to be both interesting and valuable in establishing Orly's conscious awareness of 'form'. On November 11, Orly happened to find the page with the transcription of her speech of October 10. She read through it and said: "Oh, my goodness, I made so many mistakes". She was immediately given a pencil to correct the mistakes which she could find on that page. She managed to correct over 80% of the errors on that page, mainly inserting the auxiliary BE where it was missing with the progressive form. At that point, Orly was producing 90% correct responses in natural speech while she managed to correct only 80% of her recorded errors. It seems therefore that ability to evaluate an utterance as 'well formed' lags slightly behind the ability to produce such forms. This may be true however only with younger learners who acquire the second language in its natural setting.

The technique of self-correction was consistently utilized after November 11, in order to support the data that was collected via spontaneous speech. Orly was consistent in her ability to correct errors previously made, at a level of accuracy which was just slightly lower than her level of production. She did not correct usage of function however. On the other hand, the other two subjects investigated with the same techniques showed very low ability to correct themselves, even when their level of correct production reached 90%. [5]

The elicitation techniques for 'initiation of free speech' and 'talking about pictures' were used in every session except in cases where 'retelling a story' took up most of the time. These were the techniques that provided the obligatory contexts for use of the progressive form and which were used for the calculation of the correct responses. 'Imitation of sentences' was used once every two sessions in order to compare it with the spontaneous data, and 'self correction' was only used during the period of November 10 through December 2.

All the above described elicitation techniques were found useful during the period of Orly's acquisition of the progressive FORM. It was very hard to evaluate Orly's acquisition of FUNCTION until the FORM was fully acquired (90% of obligatory contexts with all forms of the BE auxiliary) since her choice between the simple form of the verb and its -ing fluctuated considerably. Thus Orly could produce, in the same context, both forms: "Every day a lot of children go into the cafeteria. They going with their lunch boxes." As long as such mixing of forms occurred, it was impossible to evaluate function from the spontaneous data. It seems that her choice of the -ing form versus the simple form is related to the frequency of such forms in the input available to Orly during the day. Thus it is interesting to note that she never had the form 'knowing' since she probably never heard it or only very seldom. On the other hand there were many instances of 'reading', 'writing', 'working' etc. which are presumably used during classroom activities, while 'have', 'do', 'go' 'learn' occurred mainly in the simple form.

It was necessary therefore to set up special tests for the assessment of FUNCTION:

(a) description of pictures with questions guiding the subject to talk about present activities that are still in progress, as well as past and future ones.

(b) translation of a set of sentences from Hebrew into English, focusing on function, provided a more rigorous obligatory context.

(c) a written test requiring the subject to fill in the suitable form of the verb in a given blank.

These special function tests were administered starting November 1, to the end of the study.

Data Analysis

A brief grammatical analysis is necessary before the data collected for this study can be properly evaluated in terms of a Hebrew speaker acquiring the English progressive. The English progressive must first be viewed as an early acquisition item for any second language learner; secondly it must be viewed, in our case, from the point of view of a learner whose L1 is Hebrew. Such an analysis is not suggested here as a tool to predict some of the results of the study, but rather to help explain the data obtained.

Judy Wagner-Gough (1975) presents several possible reasons for the early acquisition of the progressive form:

(a) The -ing morpheme is easily recognizable.
(b) It is frequent in speech.
(c) It is phonologically stable.
(d) It does not, morphophonemically, affect the base form of the verb.

Although Gough's explanation for the early acquisition of the progressive is a logical one, it can only account for the Verb-ing form. If we want to account for the full form of BE+Verb-ing, we must add a few additional factors, which might make the task of acquisition a much harder one:

(a) In terms of subject/verb agreement, BE exhibits the most complex agreement set in English.
(b) In the normal use of the progressive in English, BE+Verb-ing, often forms a discontinuous constituent, for example in questions and negatives.
(c) There are many instances where the form Verb-ing occurs without the BE auxiliary, as in:
    (i) conjoined sentences "They are reading and writing".
    (ii) in answers to questions: "Are you reading or writing? Reading!"
    (iii) Sometimes in rapid speech the BE auxiliary is altogether deleted: "You leaving?"
    (iv) gerundial structures often look like instances of progressive to the learner: "They have some suspicion of the police having arrested the wrong man".

The language input, in the natural setting, contains therefore many occurrences of the progressive both with and without the BE auxiliary, thus making it harder for the learner to arrive at a valid internalized rule.

As Wagner-Gough (1975) points out, the progressive in English is complex not only in terms of FORM but also in terms of its FUNCTION.

If we summarize Jespersen (1964), Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) and Leech(1971), we can establish at least the following semantic functions that the English progressive exhibits:

(a) An action viewed in process (incomplete) and of limited duration; e.g. "She is rewriting the first chapter of her book."
(b) A habit which is in existence for a limited period; e.g. "I'm taking French lessons."
(c) A future activity; e.g. "We're visiting our friends tomorrow."
(d) A persistent or continuous activity; e.g. "He's always smoking."

In its most common use, (a) above, the English progressive signals durativity and incompleteness, which are probably the features which cause the L2 learner most of the difficulties. These features are particularly problematic for speakers of a language like Hebrew where there is no distinction between durative and non-durative, or between complete and incomplete. The contrast between present progressive and simple present is therefore unfamiliar to the learner.

Hebrew is considered a three-way tense system: past, present and future. There is no real equivalent to the progressive or perfect aspects in English. The following examples will illustrate the difference between Hebrew and English:

hu ʔoved - means either "He is working" or "He works" according to context.
hu ʔavad - can mean "He worked","He was working", "He has/had worked".
hu yaʔavod -"He will/would/will be/ work(ing)".

Based on the above comparison between Hebrew and English we might expect a Hebrew speaker to find the semantic function of the progressive particularly difficult.

The data for the present study was collected during ten sessions. The material from each session was classified in terms of verb forms:

(a) verbs lacking -ing in progressive obligatory contexts representing a durative,incomplete action in present or past.
(b) Verb-ing without the BE auxiliary - in the same context.
(c) correct forms of BE+Verb-ing in this context.
(d) other verb forms used consistently at the same time such as simple present forms, simple past forms, and future reference expressed with the modal 'will'.

RESULTS

Orly's acquisition of the English progressive displays a number of consecutive stages. The stages form a continuum of acquisition, starting with unstable use of Verb-ing, Verb, and BE+Verb, within the context of the basic durative function, and finally reaching full command of both FORM and FUNCTION.

Two separate sets of criteria had to be used in evaluating acquisition of form versus acquisition of function. Brown's notion of obligatory contexts proved useful in the evaluation of form; that is, a form produced in 90% of the contexts in which it is clearly required. By calculating the percentage of correct responses over a period of time we get the relative sequence in the acquisition of the different BE+Verb-ing forms. Thus am/'m+Verb-ing was the first form acquired, followed by is+Verb-ing and finally are+Verb-ing. The first three stages in Table One below show this relative sequence in Orly's acquisition of the progressive form. A stage is therefore defined in terms of the percentage of correct instances of the auxiliary form.

The acquisition of semantic function cannot be established by the criterion of percentage of correct responses within an obligatory context. The learner might for instance use the progressive form for functions that are not related to the progressive in English. As long as the learner has such an expanded usage of progressive forms over and above the obligatory contexts calling for the progressive, we cannot assume that function has been acquired. Semantic function can only be evaluated in terms of semantic contrast with other forms. The present progressive contrasts in many instances with the simple form and the past progressive with simple past. In order to establish acquisition of function, it is necessary therefore to set up special tests requiring the learner to make choices between semantically contrasting forms.

In Orly's case there is evidence for form emerging prior to function. In Stage Four where she reached 90% of correct responses in obligatory contexts, she finds it hard to choose between two forms, the simple and the progressive, even though the context is clearly defined; and in her spontaneous speech she often uses progressive forms where the context requires the simple form with its timeless meaning; e.g. "every morning we are standing in line before we walk to class." Then, almost instantaneously Orly acquires the function of the progressive and makes the proper choices between the simple and the progressive forms in a variety of tests specifically set up for this purpose. She cannot consciously explain her preference but she knows that 'it sounds better'. 11

Table One presents the stages of development in Orly's acquisition of the English progressive. The fact that FUNCTION is stabilized later than FORM can be explained on the basis of the difference between Hebrew and English. Within the acquisition of form we see an interesting sequence: am+Verb-ing is acquired very early; is+Verb-ing follows gradually and finally are+Verb-ing is acquired. During this gradual development Orly begins using the past (both in progressive and simple) and immediately produces correct forms of was/were+Verb-ing. In other words, once the past is introduced it is used correctly without going through any obvious stages of development. In terms of function however, both in present and past, Orly uses the progressive beyond its obligatory contexts and makes no definite semantic contrast until stage five.

The internal sequence within the progressive FORM as evident in this study raises a number of additional questions that may warrant further research:

(a) Is the exhibited sequence affected by the input available to the learner? It is possible that the first person singular and the third person singular are more frequent than the other forms in discourse typical of the second grade.

(b) The sequence of the forms acquired might be related to the extent to which they are stable within native speech. Thus first person singular is never deleted in rapid speech while second person, for instance, often is.[6]

(c) Is the sequence presented here typical of all Hebrew speakers or of all learners of the same age? This will require replication of similar studies with learners of various language backgrounds and age levels.

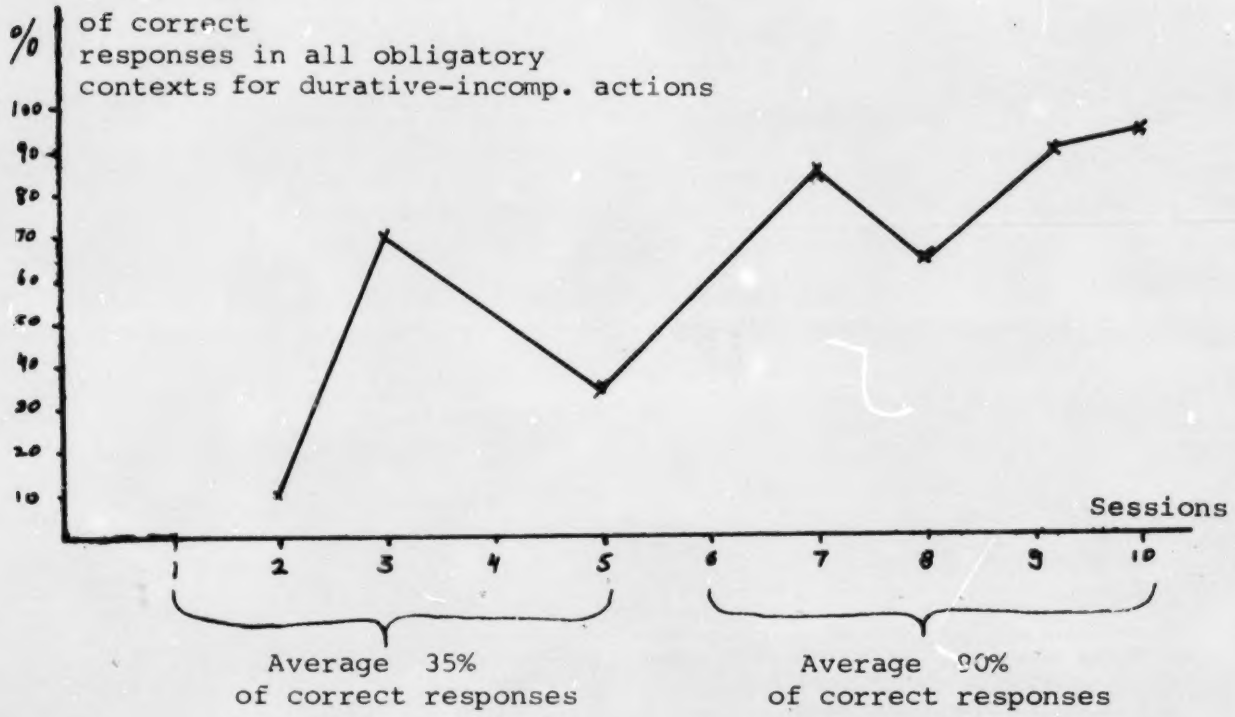
The acquisition of form, as frequently reported by researchers, seems to follow a sequence of 'peaks and valleys' in terms of correct usage in obligatory contexts. Learning the form of a structure is therefore not a smooth progression showing constant increase in the number of correct responses. If this assumption is correct, Orly's acquisition of any particular auxiliary form should show the same tendency towards peaks and valleys in the acquisition line. Let us therefore follow the gradual development in Orly's acquisition of the third person singular in the present.

In order to follow closely the acquisition of a particular form we need to plot the percentage of correct responses over time. This will result in the line or graph showing the continuum of acquisition. The following diagram describes Orly's acquisition of the third person singular is+Verb-ing, and very clearly indicates the expected peaks and valleys.

TABLE ONE - Stages of Development in the Acquisition of the English Progressive - Present and Past In Durative-Incomplete Contexts

Stage	Classification	numb.of correct	% responses
Stage One (prior to study) Sep.20-Oct. 1	Unstable use of: Verb, Verb-ing, BE+Verb-ing	not recorded	-
Stage Two			
Sessions 1-5 Oct.1 - Oct.10	1st pers sing am/'m+Verbing	35	100%
	3rd pers sing is+Verbing	10	35%
	other persons are+Verbing	2	10%
Stage Three	FORM		
Sessions 6-10 Oct.10-Nov.10	1st pers sing am+Verbing	22	100%
	was+Verbing	5	100%
	3rd pers sing is+Verbing	38	90%
	was+Verbing	3	100%
	other persons are+Verbing	27	80%
	were+Verbing	5	100%
Sessions 9-10 Nov.1-Nov.10	FUNCTION in obligatory context	33	60%
Stage Four			
Tests on function Nov.10 - Nov. 25	FORM (all pers. present/past	37	90%
	FUNCTION in obligatory context	37	90%
	in context for simple form	8	20%
Stage Five			
Tests on function Dec. 2	FORM	12	100%
	FUNCTION	12	100%
	(no instances of using progressive instead of simple)		

The Development of Acquisition of 3rd person sing. is+Verb-ing*



Looking at the above graphic representation of the gradual acquisition of the third person singular, one is tempted to look for explanations for the two so called 'valleys', evident in session five and session eight. Upon close examination of the data collected, we find in session five an increased use of simple present forms. There is still considerable overlapping between progressive and simple forms in contexts where the simple would be expected; e.g. "I'm getting up at seven every morning. Then I'm putting my clothes on." There seems to be however an awareness on Orly's part of the fact that two different English forms relate to the present. Is it possible that the increased use of simple present affects Orly's use of the progressive form?

Upon examination of the data collected during session eight, we find that there is suddenly an abundance of simple past forms. While looking at the same pictures as in some of the earlier sessions, Orly suddenly uses past forms where she

* each point on the graph represents percentage of correct responses during a session. In sessions 4 and 6 there were no instances of is+Verb-ing.

had used present progressive. Thus while looking at a picture of a little girl looking sadly at a dog running away with a ball in its mouth, Orly had said earlier: "The girl is crying and the dog is running away with the ball in his mouth". In session eight however she produced the following utterance: "Here he took the ball and he ran away, and she called the father and she said 'Father the dog took the ball in his mouth and ran away'"

It seems therefore that in the two sessions where the 'valleys' occurred, Orly was concerned with relatively new forms. Especially in session eight it seemed that Orly almost forced the past form into most of her utterances - as if deliberately practising that form. Is it possible that the learner's more intent concern with a new structure or form causes a setback in a previous structure which has not yet been fully acquired? This is at least a plausible hypothesis which should be taken up in further research.

The evaluation of the acquisition of function, as was mentioned earlier, is much more intricate than the evaluation of the acquisition of form. As we have seen above, it is not sufficient to consider the obligatory contexts for the progressive in determining function,but it is necessary to examine all cases of Verb-ing in order to determine which functions they actually fulfill in the subject's speech. Thus in Orly's case there is clear indication of progressive being used in contexts calling for the simple form. In the present study we concerned ourselves only with the basic durative function of the progressive in both present and past. A series of tests was therefore set up in order to examine the degree of semantic contrast in terms of progressive versus simple forms. These were administered beginning on November 1.

Test A consisted of data collected through the same techniques that were mentioned earlier: initiation of free speech and talking about pictures, with more emphasis on natural discourse.

Investigator: Orly, tell me about school; I know what you do in reading but what do you do in Math every day? Can you tell me exactly what the teacher does and what the students do in Math?

Orly: In Math we are getting papers to work with. First the teacher is explaining and then we are working.
Today we did popcorn. (sudden switch to another idea and another tense)

There is evidence in the above exchange that Orly naturally prefers the progressive form and uses it almost in any context that calls for present tense. This is not surprising in terms of

contrastive analysis between Hebrew and English.

When presented with a context for using the past tense, Orly mainly used the simple past but once or twice switched from simple to progressive without any clear contextual change. When asked why she switched fromone to the other she thought for a moment and then just shrugged her shoulders.

The results based on this first testing technique dealt with during stage four, can be summarized as follows:

(a) Orly had truly acquired the FORM of the progressive in both present and past but seemed to make no distinction between simple and progressive forms.

(b) In the present tense she preferred the use of the progressive form, while in the past she favored the simple form.

(c) There seems to be good evidence of the acquisition of FORM prior to FUNCTION.

Test B - a series of translation tests was set up with the distinct objective of further focusing on the semantic contrast between progressive and simple forms. Again only the durative function of the progressive was considered. It was felt that a 'translation technique' as discussed by Taylor (1975), would be a more rigorous test for function.

Orly was given a set of 8-10 sentences at a time, all related in terms of the situation which they described, and she was asked to translate them orally from Hebrew into English. The results of the translation test further reinforced the results of the test A set; Orly used predominantly the progressive for all present forms and a mixture of simple and progressive for the past. There appeared to be no clear distinction in her mind between progressive and non-progressive.

Test C - Following the translation test it was decided to give Orly a written test requiring the filling in of the progressive or the simple form of the verb, in blank spaces. The sentences used for this purpose constituted a description of a picture at which she was looking while filling in the blanks. Surprisingly she filled most of the sentences with the simple form in the present. When asked to explain why she had chosen 'sit' for instance instead of 'are sitting', her answer was:"Well, there wasn't enough room for the longer one". Thus, even this last set of tests further reinforces the interpretation that Orly had no notion of why English used the two forms, but was only aware that one looked 'longer' when written out on paper.

A week later the same set of tests (A,B,and C)was given to Orly and suddenly she was distinguishing, in 90% of the cases, between simple and progressive forms, in both the present and the past. The results were astonishing in view of the fact that only a week earlier there was no apparent notion of function. In order to further verify the degree of acquisition of function, Orly was asked why she used one form rather than the other and her answer was: "it's better this way". There almost seemed to have been a 'eureka' type discovery on Orly's part, in terms of awareness of the function of progressive and simple in English. It was only about six weeks after the present study was completed,that Orly was able to actually define the reason why she chose the progressive rather than the simple form by saying: "it was still happening..." which was her way of defining the durative/incomplete function of the progressive.

Conclusions

The present study investigated the development of the acquisition of FORM and FUNCTION of the English progressive by one learner. In this case the subject acquired form prior to function. The acquisition of form displayed four consecutive stages, defined in terms of correct responses within obligatory contexts: stage one - unstable use of all verb forms;stage two - full acquisition of 1st person singular and partial acquisition of other BE+Verb-ing forms; stage three - full acquisition of both 1st and 3rd persons singular but only partial acquisition of are+Verb-ing forms; and finally stage four with full acquisition of all BE+Verb-ing forms in both present and past. The acquisition of each form when examined independently exhibits 'peaks' and 'valleys' in terms of correct responses, as has often been stated in research elsewhere.

In terms of the acquisition of function, stages are much more difficult to define. It seems obvious however in the case of the one subject investigated in the present paper, that during the four stages of form-acquisition,there was no real semantic contrast that could imply also acquisition of function. Even when form was fully acquired, the subject made no significant choice between simple and progressive forms, but she was aware of the physical difference between the two forms; e.g. length. This might be one stage towards the acquisition of function. Then there was a 'sudden discovery' of function. Being accustomed to gradual stages in form,this bothers us greatly. Yet when we consider the fact that function is an abstract, semantic internalization on the part of the learner, should we expect gradual stages? Especially since here we are not dealing with

conscious learning but unconscious acquisition.

In an attempt to break down the acquisition of function into developmental stages, we might note the following: during the early period of acquisition of the progressive the subject was mostly involved in the acquisition of FORM while applying her L1 tense system in order to group the new English form according to functions. Thus she distinguished between present and past forms,but not between progressive and non-progressive, using the latter interchangeably. This might be considered stage one in the acquisition of function when the learner views the functions in the new language through the system of his/her own language. The second stage can be viewed as the one during which the learner becomes consciously aware of the physical differences between the various forms either in term of sounds or writing. At this second stage however, the learner cannot yet make clear semantic choices and feels somewhat uneasy about the existence of these forms. From here we move directly to stage three which represents a sudden breakthrough where the learner begins to make choices according to 'feeling' and according to what 'sounds better'. As soon as 90% of these choices in semantically contrasting contexts are made, we may assume full acquisition of function. We may however even have a stage four,when the learner can consciously explain why a certain choice is made.

I would like to conclude this paper with some thoughts for future research. Since the English progressive is an early acquisition item for ESL learners, and as it appears to have distinct stages for the acquisition of form and at least potential stages in the acquisition of function, it seems a suitable candidate for an index of development at the early stage of ESL acquisition. Further research is needed however before such an index can be developed and a number of questions need to be investigated:

(a) Are the stages in the acquisition of form as established in this paper 'universal' for all learners of English as an L2, or are they only applicable to speakers of Hebrew? There is good reason to believe that they are universal in the sense that they depend more on the input of L2 than on the learner's L1.

(b) Can the suggested stages in the acquisition of function be further refined? Does the acquisition of function relate to L1 more than the acquisition of form?

(c) To what extent are data collection techniques important?

Should the same techniques be used in all studies relating to the same general question?

It seems therefore that replication of similar studies is important in developing our general understanding of the learning process and particularly in developing better tools for evaluating this process.

FOOTNOTES

1. I am grateful to Diane Larsen-Freeman and Marianne Celce-Murcia, who gave me valuable comments on an earlier version of this paper.

2. The fourteen morphemes that Brown (1973) focuses on are the following: the present progressive inflection -ing, third person singular, both regular -s and irregular, past tenses both regular and irregular, the copula and auxiliary BE, the articles a and the, the prepositions in and on; and the regular plural and possessive inflections -s.

3. A paper delivered at the Los Angeles Second Language Research Forum, in October 1978, "Individual Learning Strategies: A Case Study of Three Hebrew Speakers Learning English as a Second Language" compares the three Ss in terms of learning strategies.

4. There was a significant difference between Orly's ability to imitate sentences in English and the ability in such imitation as exhibited by the other two Ss. In the study mentioned above in (3), Orly proved to be the most 'successful language learner'. Is ability to imitate correctly related to the'good language learner'? It is important to further validate the relation between 'imitation' and 'production'.

5. Self-correction might be viewed as a strategy indicating special 'attention to form'. One might speculate that learners who attend to form are better language learners than those who don't. Self-correction might be one way of tapping this strategy of 'attending to form'.

6. In an unpublished UCLA paper Jeannine Gerbault (1977) reports that the deletion of BE auxiliary with first person singular in rapid adult native speech is never acceptable while deletion of are is highly acceptable as in "You leaving now?" and third person singular about 50% acceptability of deletion. This fact might be related to the sequence of acquisition found in this study: am/'m+Verb-ing; is/'s+Verb-ing; are/'re+Verb-ing.

7. In the study mentioned in (3) above data was collected from three subjects, all native speakers of Hebrew learning English as a second language, and the three subjects exhibited the same sequential stages in the acquisition of progressive form.

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